



East Side Story

Every little detail is magic in the loving restoration of a historic Manhattan apartment.

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New York City has no shortage of storied apartment buildings with blue-chip architecture and well-heeled residents, but few have the pedigree of the majestic River House. Completed by the venerable architecture

firm Bottomley, Wagner and White in 1951, the building, whose bell-like tower and stately wings overlook the East River, has been home to the swank set, including Vanderbilts and Roosevelts, since it opened its gates nearly a century ago.

For a pair of empty nesters, the move to River House signaled a return to a cherished childhood playground, as the wife's family once belonged to the building's illustrious members-only club offering golf, tennis, swimming and dining in the heart of Manhattan. "It's a place I knew well having grown up in New York," she says. "We looked at this apartment and immediately fell in love, but we knew it was going to be a big project."

Formerly the first-floor level of a duplex, the space had been renovated and reapportioned over the years, losing much of its original charm and flow in the process. "You could tell there was potential, but it didn't feel like anything special," shares architect Erin Hook, who oversaw the home's transformation with her husband and business partner Tim Hook in collaboration with designer Sallie Giordano. "It felt like what it was: one half of somebody's once-grand apartment," Erin adds.

Key to redefining the unit as a gracious, single-story residence was eliminating the disconnect between the gloriously ornate lobby downstairs and the apartment's comparatively commonplace one. "When you walk into the building, you are greeted by eglomise panels and lots of marble," Giordano says. "The apartment needed to have the same sense of luxury and stature." For inspiration, the trio looked to the River House's unique blend of Art Deco opulence and Beaux Arts classicism. "The clients wanted to use the flavor of Deco, but in a softer, more restrained way," Tim explains. Enlarging the entry and organizing it through a series of minimalist, Regency-style arches inspired by the work of British architect John Soane created a formal gallery to set that tone upon arrival. "We love the neoclassical period

and thought there was a good interweaving of that with what Bottomley had done," he notes.

Moving off the entry, thoughtful details engage the eye at every turn. Fluted columns frame the opening to the living room, where a custom built-in bar with eglomise doors by artisan Miriam Ellner echo those in the building's entry. "We wanted it to look like we had placed a contemporary piece of furniture inside an old-fashioned paneled closet," Giordano explains of the concept. "We loved the idea of taking something modern and putting it in a traditional envelope."

The same could be said of their approach to the narrow, jewel-box dining room, which underwent a dramatic transformation through the addition of plaster paneling with mirrored accents, as well as hand-painted silk panels featuring a koi-fish motif. Above, a tented ceiling design hides existing roof drainage pipes for a result that is both a practical solution and a stunning showpiece.

Meanwhile, a meticulous reconceiving of many rooms' proportions ushered the residence into modern living. The existing galley-style cooking space, former maids' quarters and a back hallway were consolidated to form a new, larger eat-in kitchen. And, because the apartment had limited closets, private living spaces were reconfigured to give both the owners' suite and the guest room his-and-hers dressing rooms as well as clever hidden built-ins.

When it came time to furnish the space, Giordano then used the period-inspired interior architecture as a backdrop to juxtapose shapely, modern-leaning silhouettes with the owners' contemporary art collection. It's that exacting cocktail of old and new—fueled by a wonderfully collaborative effort between architects and designer—that elevates the space and helps bridge the gap between the glamorous past it references and the more current tastes of its present-day owners.

"There's something really appealing about the Art Deco era and its outlook on embracing change," Tim says. "It was a time to think about comfort, convenience and what easy, elegant living could look like—and that translates to this project." And no one is happier with the finished push and pull than the clients. "I love the thoughtfulness of every detail and molding, and the utility of how you walk into a room and how it presents itself," the wife shares. "It's just perfect." ■



Over the entry door, a custom lunette made by Plaster Works Inc. with Foster Reeve and sculptor Emily Bedard features an Art Deco-inspired starburst design. Artwork by Garth Weiser hangs over a Wood and Hogan console. The lantern is by Jamb.



A Gabriel Vormstein piece welcomes guests in the foyer. Custom columns flank the entry to the living room, where a Lorna Simpson painting hangs over the mantel, and Masson daybeds by Dmitriy & Co sit opposite a coffee table from Cosulich Interiors & Antiques.

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Right: It took a team of artisans to bring the built-in bar cabinet from idea to reality. Grace and Ryan Inc handled the millwork, Object Metal Inc the metalwork, and artist Miriam Ellner crafted the egolomise door panels. The vintage globe pendant is Murano glass.

Opposite: Midcentury Klismos chairs and a card table by EcoFirstArt offer a chic game night spot in the living room. An Erik Lindström hand-knotted rug features a bird motif. The 1940s floor lamp is a 1st dibs find and the wall art is by EV. Day.





White oak cabinets and bespoke flooring from Shelly Tile bring warmth and pattern to the kitchen. The breakfast area dons a Julian Chichester hammered-brass table base topped with onyx, and Christopher Farr fabric on the banquette.

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Above: Walls upholstered in Lee Jofa's Lamorna embroidered linen offer a delicate backdrop for a statement headboard by LF Upholstery in the guest room. The alabaster lamp is by Julie Neill for Circa Lighting and features with a jaunty custom shade.

Opposite: In the same room, a leather chair by Wood and Hogan offers a place to sit and scribble a note under the glow of a retro-style desk lamp. A tailored Roman blind made from Aldeco raw linen provides a soft filter at the window.



Left: In the primary bath, Carrara marble surrounds the tub. Ann Sacks' geometric Mulholland tile on the floor and a Charles Edwards star pendant play into the Art Deco vibe of the building while still feeling of this time.

Opposite: A blue-silk wallcovering from Cowtan & Tout creates a luxurious cocoon in the primary bedroom, where a Liz O'Brien plaster Shell pendant adds ambient lighting. Artwork by Chris Ofili provides an edgy counterpoint.

